

Teacher Encouraging Discourse in the Film *Freedom Writers*

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INTRODUCTION

In a classroom interaction, the role of the teacher plays a central part that may contribute not only to students' learning but also their personal development. As it is advocated in UNESCO's *Four Pillars of Education*, students are not only assisted "to learn to know and to do", but also "to learn to live together and to learn to be" (www.unesco.org/delors/fourpil.htm). In line with that Indonesia's National Education System aims at "developing learners' potentials so that they become persons imbued with human values who are faithful and pious to one and only God; who possess morals and noble character; who are healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent; and as citizens, are democratic and responsible" (Act of the Republic of Indonesia on National Education System Number 20, Year 2003, article 3). These mean that teachers are expected to contribute more than just leading the learners to achieve their academic goals. Teachers, however, faced with their materials and the academic goals to achieve may be tempted to merely focus their performance on the students' academic achievement.

A classroom can be considered a communication setting, in which "spoken language is the medium by which much teaching takes place" (Cazden, 2001, p. 2). What teacher utters in the class also has a certain important impact on the learners, since "actions are performed through utterances", which are called "speech acts" (Yule, 2008, 47). Through discourse, teachers can impart information or knowledge. Through discourse, they can build relationship and socialize with the learners. In the same way, through discourse, teachers can attend to the affective side of the learners in addition to the cognitive side, which has proved to be of great importance in the teaching and learning process. It was observed that "words have power; words do affect attitudes and behavior" (Beebe, S.A., Beebe, S.J. and Redmond, M, 2011, p159). In fact, "there is evidence from a wide variety of fields which indicates that attention to affect-related concepts is playing a very important role in the solution to many types of problems and in the attainment of a more fulfilling way of life" (Arnold, 2005, p xii). Specifically, it is suggested that "positive messages be communicated in the classroom to enhance students' self esteem since their beliefs about their abilities strongly influence their performance". These refer to encouraging discourse, the kind of discourse that "gives courage or confidence or hope" (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/encouraging>). It enhances students' self-esteem that they are worthy and promotes the confidence that they are capable of doing something good to actualize their potentials.

The film “Freedom Writers” is a biographic gender based on the true story of Erin Gruwell and her students as recorded in the book “The Freedom Writers Diary” (The Freedom Writers and Erin Gruwell, 2009). It shows how Erin Gruwell, the teacher managed to empower a group of 150 students, who were considered “unteachable”, that they finally succeeded in their secondary school study. This gave me the inspiration to carry out the study to investigate her use of discourse to her students. This paper is based on a further research to the unpublished master thesis entitled “Teacher Discourse in the film Freedom Writers: Empowering the Students” (Mardijono, 2011), focusing on the teacher’s encouraging discourse and the students’ responses.

What a teacher utters can be analyzed in terms of locutionary act, the act of “producing a meaningful linguistic expression”; illocutionary act, the act performed “via the communicative force of an utterance” with certain “communicative purpose”; and perlocutionary act, generally known as perlocutionary effect referring to the effect on the listener (Yule, 2008, pp. 48-49). The responses of the listener can be classified into two, in terms of “preference structure” in relation to “adjacency pairs”: “preferred social act”, the structurally expected next move” and “dispreferred social act”, “the structurally unexpected next act” (Yule, 2008, pp 78-79). They are respectively labeled as positive responding acts and negative responding acts (Tsui, 1995, p 58). The positive responding act “responds positively” to the preceding utterance, “fulfilling the illocutionary intent” of the addressee; whereas, the negative responding act “respond negatively” by “not fulfilling the illocutionary intent” (Tsui, 1995, pp 162-163). Following Tsui, responses can be verbal and non-verbal. There is the class of acts which “expect an obligatory non-verbal response accompanied by an optional verbal response and those which expect an obligatory verbal response or its non-verbal surrogate” (p.52). These can be applied to analyze the type of students’ responding acts given towards the teacher’s illocutionary acts, which can be classified into “declarations, representations, expressiveives, directives, and commissives” (Yule, 2008, p.49).

There are ten classroom scenes in the film “Freedom Writers”, as the source of data, from which the teacher’s encouraging discourse and the students’ responses, as the data, may be identified and analyzed. Employing the theories on speech acts (Yule, 2008; Searle, 1976 cited in Cutting, 2008; Hatch, 1997) and responding acts (Tsui, 1995), this study seeks to find out the illocutionary acts of the teacher’s encouraging utterances and the perlocutionary effects viewed from the students’ types of responding acts towards the teacher’s utterances.

THE TEACHER ENCOURAGING DISCOURSE

From the ten classroom scenes of the film “Freedom Writers”, the encouraging discourse produced by the teacher could be identified in three classroom scenes, namely scene 6 (six), scene 7 (seven) and the last scene, scene 10 (ten). The teacher’s use of encouraging discourse,

in terms of illocutionary acts, and the students' responses can be summed up in the following table:

Teacher's use of encouraging discourse and students' responses

Students' responses Teacher discourse	Scene 6		Scene 7		Scene 10	Total
	+ / NV	- / NV	+ / NV	+ / V+NV	+ / NV	
Commissive	5	-	-	-	-	5
Representative	3	-	3	-	7	13
Directive	6	1	2	1	2	12
Expressive	-	-	1	-	-	1
Total						

The teacher's encouraging utterances were classified into four types of illocutionary acts, namely, commissive, representative, directive and expressive, with representatives having the highest frequency, and directives the second highest one, followed by two minor types commissives, and expressive occurring only once in Scene 7 (seven).

The encouraging utterances of the representative type express the teacher's belief in the students. She believes that each of the students has an important story to tell. She believes that that they can and have the capability to change to have better future. Those of the directive type reveal what she wants to get the students to do. Through her directive discourse she directs the students to write their own stories, what to write and how they can write in their diaries and how they can have the teacher to read the stories if they want to. Through her commissive speech acts, she promises what she will do with the students' diaries. Whereas, through her expressive speech acts, she expresses how she feels about the students that each of them is special.

The students' responses are mostly positive nonverbal responses when they follow the teacher's utterances, paying attention, complying to the teacher's communicative intent, except one negative nonverbal response occurring in scene 6 (six) towards the directive type. Besides, there is only one positive combined type of verbal and nonverbal response in scene 7 (seven).

The following is the detailed presentation of the encouraging discourse produced by the teacher in each of the scenes.

Classroom Scene 6: The Diary

This scene takes place immediately after the Line Game scene, scene 6 (six), where the teacher engaged the students to interact and have better understanding towards one another as seen in the following:

the students began to show their cooperation by responding positively through their non-verbal responding acts towards the teacher's directive acts participating in the game, by either moving towards or away from the line in answering the teacher's questions the students let the teacher direct them to get to know one another better including those they dislike due the ethnic differences. This is the beginning of the empathetic feelings replacing their intolerance towards those who are not like them but who actually are like them in terms of suffering and painful life. With the positive interaction developing among the students, the teacher leads them to the next stage towards empowerment... (Mardijono, 2011)

At the beginning of the scene, the teacher is taking journal note books out of the bag to distribute to the students using the kind of encouraging discourse as shown in the following utterances:

1.6.2 *Everyone has their own story, and it's important for you to tell your own story (.) even to yourself (.)*

This type of representative speech act states what the teacher knows and believes that each of the students has an important story to tell, which is something different from how they have been treated. This is related to their self-worth, contributing to their self-esteem. To this the students listen attentively, giving positive non-verbal response.

Later, through her directive speech act, she directs them to write their own diary, what and when they can write, while giving them the options to choose as seen in the following:

1.6.4 *You can write about whatever you want (.) the past (.) the present (.) the future (.)*

1.6.5 *You can write it like a diary, or you can write songs (.) poems (.) any good thing (.) bad thing (.) anything (.)*

1.6.6 *But you have to write every day (.)*

1.6.7 *Keep a pen nearby (.) Whenever you feel the inspiration (.)*

They are all directive speech acts, telling them what to do but giving them room to choose what type of writing they want to write. Although they are told to do it every day, they can choose when, and they are also given the way how to do it. This shows the teacher respects their freedom although there is also a rule that they have to follow, to write every day.

Then, she promises that she will not grade the students' writing as she believes that the students are writing something true about themselves, for which she asks for their confirmation:

1.6.8 *And they won't be graded* (.)

1.6.9 *How can I give an A or a B for writing the truth, right* (.)

The teacher shows that she trusts them to write something truthful about their lives. Besides, she shows she respects their privacy with their own diaries, as shown in the following commissive speech acts, promising that she will not read their diaries unless they want her to read, giving them the safe place to put their diaries in to share their writing with the teacher, and with the directive type she asks for their agreement with the arrangement:

1.6.10 *And I will not read them unless you give me permission* (.)

1.6.11 I will need to see that you've made an entry 9.) but I'll just do this (.) skim to see that you wrote that day (.)

1.6.12 Now (.) if you want me to read it (.) I have (..) Excuse me (.) A cabinet over here(.

1.6.13 It has a lock on it (.)

1.6.14 I will keep it open during class (.) and you can leave your diary there if you want me to read it (.)

1.6.15 I will lock this cabinet at the end of every class (.)

1.6.16 Okay (.)

Her use of directive type also reveals her respect for the students to do something out of their own will not because they are told to. When everything was explained she invites them to come forward to get the journal book whenever they are ready:

1.6.17 So, you can each come up, one by one, and take your own journal (...) whenever you're ready (.)

Although, as a teacher she has the authority to ask the students to just come forward and accept her offer and follow her instruction, she gives them time to do it on their own accord.

In this scene the students give positive non-verbal responses by listening to her, following what she is saying. When they are directed to come forward to get the books, at first they hesitate to react, giving negative non-verbal response. Some time afterwards, however, the students all give the positive non-verbal response when each of them comes forward to get the journal notebook, thus accepting her offer and her direction to write their journal every day.

Classroom Scene 7: The Toast for Change

As the students open themselves to accept the teacher's offer, their relationship gets better. In this scene the teacher invites the students to have a toast for change to be better. The teacher gives a more direct directive speech act telling the students directly what she wants them to do, to step forward to take the bags containing the four books they are going to read.

1.7.2 *Okay (.) guys (.) gals, (.) listen up (.) This is what I want you to do (.)*

1.7.3 *I want each of you to step forward and take one of these Borders bags, which contain the four books we're gonna read this semester (.)*

This direct order is followed by the students positively, both through the verbal and non-verbal response later:

2.7.3 All right!

This is the first time they react both verbally and non-verbally, responding positively to the teacher's communicative intent. Then, through the expressive speech act, the teacher expresses her feelings about the books that they are special, which reminds her of each of the students. In this way she expresses how she feels about each of the students.

1.7.4 *They're very special books (.) and they each remind me, in some way (.) of each of you (.)*

By listening to what that the teacher implies about them, that each of the students is special, the students have positive non-verbal response with their smiling faces. This makes them feel good about themselves, thus contributing to the enhancing of their self-esteem. Besides, what the teacher expresses through her discourse, that the books remind her of each of them signifies how she cares about the students, that each of them is in her mind, if not in her heart.

Prior to the distribution of the books, through her directive speech act, she wants them to make a toast for change, while clarifying the meaning of the toast making and expressing what she believes in the students through her representative speech act as seen in the following:

1.7.7 *And what that means is (.) from this moment on every voice that told you "You can't" is silenced (.)*

1.7.8 *Every reason that tells you things will never change (.) disappears (.)*

1.7.9 *And the person you were before this moment (.) that person's turn is over (.)*

Making the toast means that they can make a better change of their lives, assuring them 'that every voice that told them "you can't" is silenced' and "every reason that tells you things will never change disappears", that the old selves are replaced by the new selves. Then, through her directive speech acts, she wants them to take their turn to change now and asks for their agreement to start the action at once:

1.7.10 *Now it's your turn (.)*

1.7.11 Okay (.)

1.7.12 Okay (.) you ready to get this party going on (.)

In response, the students give their positive non-verbal and verbal responses. They follow what the teacher says attentively meeting the teacher's communicative intention. Each of the students steps forward to take the glass, make a toast. This non-verbal positive responding act is accompanied by their verbal responses. Each of them shares what he/she used to be and what they are going to be with the toast for change. This is also the first time they share about themselves, their bitter past experience and their wish for a better future.

Classroom Scene 10: The Final Project

This final scene starts with the teacher informing that their request to have her teach them in the junior year is not granted, and they cannot be together in the following year, to which the students protest. The teacher tries to calm down the students. By her directive speech acts, she tells them not to use her as the excuse why they cannot make it in the junior year. The teacher wants them not to depend on her, but to depend on themselves as they have succeeded in their first year:

1.10.7 Don't use me as another excuse for why you can't make it (.)

Through her representative speech act, she asserts that the students succeeded in their first year of study. Through her directive speech act, she asks them to reflect how they succeeded in their first year of study. In this way they are made to look into themselves and be more aware of their own potentials.

1.10.8 You made it to your junior year (.)

1.10.9 Think about how you did that (.)

Through her representative speech acts, she asserts her belief in the students, that everyone in the classroom has a chance to succeed. Admitting that although some may move faster than others, each has a chance to graduate, for which they proved their capabilities in their freshmen year. By asking them to reflect on their past experience, she encourages the students to have confidence in their own capabilities without depending on her:

1.10.10 Everyone in this room has a chance to graduate (.)

1.10.11 For some, you'll be the first in your family (.) The first with a choice to go to college (.)

1.10.12 Some may move faster than others (.)

1.10.13 But you'll each have the chance (.)

1.10.14 And you did that (.)

1.10.15 Not me (.)

By emphasizing that it was the students who succeeded in their study not the teacher, she promotes their confidence that they can do it by themselves.

Towards the end of the last scene, the narrator highlights the encouraging discourse of the teacher as seen in the following utterances:

2.10.8 *She told us we have something to say to people.*

2.10.11 *We were writers with our own voices, our own stories.*

By telling the students that they have something to say to people, it asserts her belief in the importance of her students that contributes to the enhancing of their self-esteem. More forcefully she asserts that they are writers of their own stories with their own voice. Having their self esteem enhanced and their confidence built, the students respond positively, using writing as a tool to share their stories with others. They all, later, become freedom writers the name they have chosen to call themselves as suggested by the teacher.

In summary, the teacher's encouraging discourse is expressed in four different illocutionary acts with representatives and directives dominating the discourse, accompanied by two minor types of commissive and expressive one. Those encouraging utterances, one way or another has touched upon the students' affective side, by enhancing their self-esteem and promoting their self-confidence. Through her representative discourse she asserts what she thinks about the students, that each of them has an important story to tell, then she expresses her feelings to the students through her expressive act that each of them is special. This type of discourse has impact on the students' self-worth and enhances their self-esteem, which is quite different from what others have reflected to them that they are of marginal groups having no importance in their society. Their self-esteem is also positively affected when she directs them to do what she wants them to do through her directive speech acts, by patiently waiting for them to react when they are ready on their own free will, even asking for their agreement. Her discourse shows that she respects the students' freedom, to act out of their own free will. As much as she wants them to act and to change, she does not use her authority to tell them what to do. In the same way, through her commissive speech act, she promises what she will do with their journal that she respects their privacy by providing them a safe place to put their diaries in. Her encouraging discourse also has positive impact on their self-confidence, expressed through her representative type of speech act asserting what she believes in the students, that each of them has the chance and potential to succeed to make a change in their life. Through her directive speech act later she encourages them to take immediate action on their own without depending on her. All these create "a looking glass" (Cooley, 1922, cited in Devito, 2009) for the students to "see a positive self-image" (Devito, 2009, p.56) of themselves, to be aware of their self-worth and their potentials, What is more, the students are offered a tool to express themselves to voice out their lives for people to read through their writing.

Responding to the teacher's encouraging discourse, the students give their positive responding acts by following the teacher's utterances attentively, giving positive non verbal responses, except for one negative non-verbal response, when they are hesitant to take the journal book. This is, however, followed by their positive non-verbal response when one by one they come forward to take it, thus complying to the teacher's communicative intention to get them to take the journal book in which they are expected to write their journal. Later, starting in scene 7

their non-verbal responses are also accompanied by their verbal response expressing their agreement, and, further, before making a toast for change, each shares his/her bitter life experience and makes a wish to change. This is also a promise to themselves that they want to start a new life as what the teacher wants them to do. In this way they also comply to the teacher's want to use writing as a tool, thus, letting the teacher lead them to the process of empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Teacher discourse plays a significant part in the students' learning process. The exemplary deed of the teacher, Erin Gruwell depicted in the film *Freedom Writers* has proved her great achievement in leading her students to the process of empowerment. Considering the power of words to influence people, this study focused on the discourse used by the teacher particularly those encouraging utterances. Analyzing the three classroom scenes containing encouraging utterances through speech acts and responding acts, the findings revealed the kinds of speech acts involved in her encouraging utterances that inspire the students the hope for a better future, having their self-esteem enhanced and their self-confidence promoted. Towards those encouraging utterances, the students give their positive response, non-verbally and both verbally and non-verbally. Hopefully, this writing will be an inspiration for those responsible in the education field that words properly and wisely used can bring positive effects on the learners.

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